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Bruna Ingraio

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Ethnicity and Growth in Development Economics¹

Bruna Ingraio²

ABSTRACT

Recent literature in development economics associated ethnic diversity and poor growth performance. The 'ethnic conjecture' should be firmly rejected as a meaningful hypothesis to explain slow growth in African States, since it is grounded on a slippery and ill-conceived concept. Alleged ethnic groups are neither 'objective categories' nor their classification is exogenous with respect to economic and political issues. Overwhelming historical evidence points out to these negative conclusions. Extensive literature in the social sciences has argued against both "objective" partitions and exogeneity. The rigid ethnic classifications in ethnology are now rejected. When such perceived, partitions of ethnic identities are often not commonly shared by the people involved, as regards both their definitions and relevance. The paper criticises the literature on ethnicity and growth performance in development economics along four main lines: the flimsy semantics of ethnicity; the alleged exogeneity of the ethnic fractionalisation variables; the fallacious idea of causality in growth processes that the ethnic conjecture illustrates; the political conclusions that result from the ethnic conjecture.

1. ETHNICITY IN ECONOMICS: OLD WINE AND NEW BOTTLES.

Writing on the advancement of the human spirit, Turgot underlined the importance and value of encounters and exchange in the development of nations and languages [Turgot, 1750]. Languages and nations meld as an effect of migrations or assimilation of conquered nations with their conquerors. Different customs and dialects mark out different nations, but the entire course of history has seen peoples recurrently merging and melding. Languages and customs, as Turgot put it in an evocative image, are coloured stripes crossing the nations of a continent in all directions, forming a sequence of shades and tones varying by degrees. Each nation is but a touch different from its closest neighbour. Herder and Humboldt perceived nation, culture and language as an integrated whole. A humanistic approach to the variety of cultures inspired Humboldt, when suggesting a deep relationship between language and culture, language being firmly bound up with the nation [Abbagnano, 1993; Leroy, 1963].

The notion saw unhappy developments, paving the way for the false iden-

¹ A preliminary version of the present paper has been presented in the session *Ethnicity in Economic Discourse* at the III STOREP Conference in Lecce, June 2006. The author thanks all the participants in the session for useful comments.

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tification of language and nation, or openly racist interpretation of human cultures [Leroy, 1963; Poliakov, 1971]. The identification of language and nation of romantic roots was assimilated in positivist culture, and it was often imbued with racist prejudices; it left a mark on the rigid ethnic classifications in ethnology in the nineteenth century. The changing spirit of the age also infected economic theory³. Marshall explicitly pointed to 'race' as an element of unity in national experience, racial homogeneity possibly facilitating and fostering economic growth. The hypothesis was conjectural, but it was clearly stated in *Appendix A* in the *Principles of Economics*. Marshall valued the plurality of cultural experiences as possibly enriching society, since it might foster economic growth through the competition of entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and capabilities; but he saw a limit to fruitful pluralism, namely the difficulties incurred by non-homogeneous societies in building common institutions. Risks of failures were higher in multiracial societies. The term 'race' had in this context an ambiguous meaning, covering both physical characteristics and moral attitudes. Race qualities, according to Marshall, are caused by the combined effect of the action of individuals, the evolution of custom and the climate conditions. Racial differences are thus conceived as the result of long-term evolutionary processes since remote times [Marshall, 1920: 723]. According to Marshall, pluralistic societies might be favourable to growth if pluralism was confined to people belonging to the same race: which – English, Teutonic, white, European, Aryan or whatever – Marshall did not specify. In *Appendix A*, however, he placed explicit emphasis on the superior qualities of the first two. Marshall's conjecture on ethnic diversity, grounded in an unpalatable mixture of racism and evolutionary theory, is expressed as follows [Marshall, 1920: 752]:

Australia also shows signs of vigour, and she has indeed some advantage over the United States in the greater homogeneity of her people. For, though the Australians – and nearly the same may be said of the Canadians – come from many lands, and thus stimulate one another to thought and enterprise by the variety of their experiences and their habits of thought, yet nearly all of them belong to one race: and the development of social institutions can proceed in some respect more easily, and faster than if they had to be adjusted to the capacities, the tempera-

³ D. Levy and S. Peart devoted well documented essays to the influence of eugenics on post-classical economics, and the consequent ranking of human groups into superior or inferior 'races' with stereotyped characteristics [Peart, 2000; Peart and Levy, 2003; 2005]

ments, the tastes, and the wants of people who have little affinity with one another.

A new version of the 'ethnic conjecture', strengthened by statistical apparatus, was back into contemporary development economics in the mid nineties of the last century. It was rephrased in more neutral terms, and a flow of literature originated on this controversial issue.

2. THE 'ETHNIC CONJECTURE' IN DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS.

In 1995 Mauro, studying corruption and growth, instrumentally introduced into the regressions an index measuring ethno-linguistic fractionalisation, the ELF index drawn up in the Seventies by Taylor and Hudson [Taylor and Hudson, 1972; Mauro, 1995]. Mauro argued that there is a negative and significant correlation between institutional efficiency and ethno-linguistic fractionalisation, so that the latter is a good instrumental variable to correct for the endogeneity bias⁴. The assertion was based on the assumption that ethno-linguistic fractionalisation was exogenous, being «unrelated to economic variables other than through its effects on institutional efficiency [...] not only do institutions affect economic performance, but also economic variables may affect institutions. In order to address the issue of exogeneity, I use an index of ethnolinguistic fractionalization [...]. Ethnolinguistic fractionalization is highly correlated with corruption and other institutional variables. Yet it can be assumed to be exogenous both to economic variables and to institutional efficiency» [Mauro, 1995: 682-683].

An additional conjecture was that the index might adversely affect investment, «not only by increasing corruption and political instability», but by slowing down diffusion of knowledge and technological innovation [Mauro, 1995: 698]. The new concept entered into comparative growth theory in the Nineties. In the literature on the 'growth tragedy' in sub-Saharan Africa, the conjecture was advanced that ethnic diversity, as measured by appropriate indexes, is a significant variable to explain failures in growth performance. In 1997 Easterly and Levine advanced the hypothesis that high ethnic diversity, as

⁴ «The criteria for characterising groups as ethnically separate related mainly to historical linguistic origin, and no economic or political variables were considered during the project» [Mauro, 1995: 692].

measured by ethnolinguistic fractionalization indexes, had a negative effect on African economic performance, generating political instability and adverse policies, and thus negatively affecting long term growth [Easterly and Levine, 1997a]. Ethnic fractionalisation was included side by side with other exogenous – environmental or geographical – variables, to be measured with *ad hoc* indexes and allegedly accounting for Africa’s poor growth performance:

Why did so many public policies all go so badly wrong in Africa? This paper examines a simple hypothesis: cross-countries differences in ethnic diversity explain a substantial part of the cross-countries differences in public policies, political instability, and other economic factors associated with long-run growth. This paper seeks a better understanding of cross-country growth differences by examining the direct effect of ethnic diversity on economic growth and by evaluating the indirect effect of ethnic diversity on public policy choices that in turn influence long-run growth rates [Easterly and Levine, 1997a: 1205].

In the literature on ethnic diversity the rationale for the association between ethnic heterogeneity and poor growth performance was argued on two grounds: the lobbying activities by organised ethnic groups, with paralysing or distorting effects on economic policies adopted by the government; the increased potential for conflict and civil war. On the first ground, ethnic diversity in local communities allegedly lowers the ability to provide public goods, because of heterogeneous preferences on public goods and the potential for conflicts on public choices (how to allocate scarce resources) or the mutually paralyzing effect. On the second ground, ethnic diversity in national communities raises the risk of conflict, civil war, political instability or poor governance, because of conflicting ethnic loyalties. Subsequently, Easterly and Levine explored the ‘speculative’ conjecture that in sub-Saharan Africa a high concentration of ‘ethnically divided countries’ created negative spill-over effects at the regional level, leading to imitation in bad economic policies [Easterly and Levine, 1997b: 138]. Africa’s growth tragedy seemed rooted in ethnic fractionalisation, estimated to be especially high in African countries.

Our data and results here suggest that what was unique about Africa was a high geographic concentration of poor policies, which Easterly and Levine showed was related to the high geographic concentration of ethnically-divided countries [Easterly and Levine, 1997b: 138].

At the turn of the last century ethno-linguistic heterogeneity had been used in

growth regressions by many authors as a significant variable to explain growth performance or discuss issues in public finance [Bloom and Sachs, 1998; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; Alesina, Baquir and Easterly, 1999; Arcand, Guillamont and Guillamont-Jeanneney, 2000; Collier, 1999a; 2000; Englebert, 2000; Putterman, 2000, among others]. Some authors maintained that ethnic diversity might be growth neutral. Polarised countries with two opposing ethnic groups may suffer seriously from their confrontation; a multiethnic democratic State should successfully manage to keep the balance among ethnic groups, avoiding acute conflict [Collier and Hoeffler, 1998]. Collier built a theoretical model to argue that ethnic diversity may be seriously damaging in terms of growth only if accompanied by the lack of political rights [Collier, 2000]. In undemocratic systems ethnically homogeneous societies grow more rapidly than highly fractionalised ones: «The lack of political rights is economically ruinous in ethnically highly fractionalised societies» [Collier, 2000: 233]. The ethnic conjecture was qualified, arguing that only moderate ethnic fractionalisation is dangerous, because it augments the risk and persistence of violent conflict among opposed ethnic factions. In highly fractionalised societies it will be more difficult to form coalitions among ethnic groups to fuel conflicts:

Only moderate fractionalisation is associated with an increased risk of civil violence; highly fractionalised societies are less likely than homogeneous societies to experience civil war. Indeed, the high diversity in Africa reduces rather than exacerbates the risk of civil conflict there. Moreover democratic institutions can substantially reduce the risk of violence. Because income is also an important determinant of the risk of conflict, democracy reduces risks both directly, by helping to defuse conflict, and indirectly, by increasing the opportunity cost of rebellion. That democracy effectively eliminates the potentially negative effects of ethnic diversity on growth while ethnic diversity reduces the risk of violent conflict is encouraging for highly diverse countries [Collier, 1999a: 388].

In 1999 Rodrik analysed growth collapses as emerging in divided societies, with weak institutions to manage conflict; he included ethnic fragmentation among the indicators of social division [Rodrik, 1999]. Khalil pointed out to ethnicity to explain African conflicts: «Some of the most intractable African conflicts have, as a root cause, the disturbance of social equilibrium as a result of historical disparities between the ethnic or tribal components of the population» [Khalil, 2000: 296-297]. Elbadawi and Sambanis perceived the danger to revive a simplistic image of African tribalism as the main drawback for growth: «Deep political and economic development failures - not tribalism or ethnic ha-

tred - are the root causes of Africa's problems» [Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 245]. They argued that the relatively high incidence of civil war in Africa was due «not to extreme ethno-linguistic fragmentation, but rather to high levels of poverty, heavy dependence on resource-based primary exports and, especially, to failed political institutions» [Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 245]. The ELF index, in combination with other estimates, was used in their paper to estimate the probability of war, but they subscribed to the thesis that high ethno-linguistic fragmentation in Africa is a deterrent for civil war, since it avoids the dangerous polarisation of ethnic conflicts:

Paradoxically, Africa's high degree of ethnic diversity, which is widely blamed for causing violent conflict, is a source of safety for most heterogeneous countries. [...] Note, for example, the extremely high risk of civil war in Asia - this is directly related to the extreme ethnic polarisation that we observe in Asian countries [Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 254].

Arcand, Guillaumont and Guillaumont Jeanneney questioned the soundness of Easterly and Levine's empirical results, concluding that they were fragile and pointing to the channels and conditions that bring ethnicity to bear more or less forcefully on growth [Arcand, Guillaumont, Guillaumont-Jeanneney, 2000: 926]. However, they did not reject the conjecture that ethnicity affects growth, and that ethnic fragmentation negatively affected growth in Africa. Englebert agreed that «the ethno-linguistic fractionalisation (ELF) index displays a significantly negative coefficient», but he pointed out to weak State legitimacy to explain Africa's slow growth, arguing that «the ethnicity index itself loses all explanatory power upon controlling for state legitimacy» [Englebert, 2000: 1831]. Collier suggested that ethnic diversity negatively affects trust among fellow citizens, increasing transactions costs [Collier, 1999a: 388]. In more ethnically homogeneous countries, mutual confidence and trust are easier to achieve. Ethnic diversity, so it seems, imposes costs reducing social capital⁵. Bates argued, on the contrary, that ethnic affiliation helps to enforce contracts between generations, on which education depends; it promotes development by promoting urbanisation and investment in education. Bates set out to test the

⁵ Miguel and Gugerty argued that ethnic diversity in rural Kenya lowers the ability of imposing social sanctions and has a negative impact on the ability to cooperate in collective action and the provision of public goods [Miguel and Gugerty, 2005].

relationship between a time-invariant measure of ethnicity ('the size of the largest ethnic group') and measures of violent conflict, admitting that the testing was severely limited by the time-invariant nature of the variable measuring ethnicity [Bates, 2000]. When the largest ethnic group became the majority of the population conflict might peak through fear of dominance and exclusion. He concluded that in Africa ethnicity had a mild effect in terms of violent conflict on account of the high ethnic diversity in most countries [Bates, 2000: 134].

Although different opinions were expressed and the conjecture was qualified, the available data on ethno-linguistic fractionalisation were assumed as scientific evidence on the phenomenon of 'ethnicity'. The concepts of 'ethno-linguistic fragmentation', 'ethno-linguistic diversity' or 'ethnic fractionalisation' were introduced as conceptual tools in development economics. Economists indulging in such exercises utilised as the main relevant variable the ELF (or ETHNIC) index, supposed to measure «the probability that two randomly selected individuals in a country belong to different ethno-linguistic groups» [Easterly and Levine, 1997a: 1206]. In growth regressions aiming at comparative analysis of the wealth of nations, scholars should take into account the different degree of homogeneity of the population in each country, as measured by this or similar indexes of 'ethno-linguistic fragmentation'. A number of economists and econometricians claimed that it is possible to build objective indexes of alleged ethnic diversity, as if the degree of ethno-linguistic diversity were an objective measurable variable, exogenous and sufficiently stable over the decades to be significant in explaining long term growth.

In 2005 Alesina and La Ferrara carefully surveyed the 'ethnic' literature with ambiguous results: the ethnic conjecture is substantially confirmed, especially as regards the lower provision of public goods in fragmented societies, though with a number of important qualifications [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 794]. The authors clearly stated that the reviewed literature assumes the 'objective' classification of individuals into ethnic groups and deals with such ethnic data as exogenous variables:

All the work surveyed above shares the assumption that ethnic groups are 'objective categories' into which individuals can be classified, and that such classification is commonly shared and exogenous. [...] Underlying most research undertaken so far is the assumption that people's ethnicity is easily identifiable and can be used to construct categories of 'homogeneous' individuals [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 788].

However, in the same survey Alesina and La Ferrara emphasized four aspects, which contrast with the assumption above: the variable definition of boundaries between ethnic groups, and the possible disagreement on which they are; the endogeneity of ethnic partitions because of active policies to reduce diversity, or because people choose identity in response to political or economic conditions; the variable relevance of various affiliations in politics, that is the changing nature of salient ethnic or religious groupings that make diversity relevant for conflict; the connection between social mobility and affiliation or identity, and thus diversity [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 789-790]. In a full section devoted to *Open Questions*, they conceded that a number of crucial issues remain with no answer in the literature, these including the proper definition of ethnicity and ethnic groups, the controversial exogeneity of ethnic partitions and their saliency in different historical contexts, the robustness of the indexes used in the literature, and a number of other qualifying assumptions: «To date it is still unclear how to integrate linguistic or ‘ethnic’ differences with other dimensions that make the latter politically or economically salient» [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 793].

The present paper argues that the open questions above undermine the soundness of all the reviewed literature. The ‘ethnic conjecture’ should be firmly rejected as a meaningful hypothesis to explain slow growth in African countries or elsewhere, since it is grounded on a slippery and ill-conceived concept. Alleged ethnic groups are neither ‘objective categories’ nor their classification is exogenous with respect to economic and political issues. Overwhelming historical evidence points out to these negative conclusions. Extensive literature in the social sciences has argued against both ‘objective’ partitions and exogeneity. The rigid ethnic classifications in ethnology are now rejected. When such perceived, partitions of ethnic identities are often not commonly shared by the people involved, as regards both their definitions and relevance⁶. The paper criticises the literature on ethnicity and growth performance in development economics along four main lines: the flimsy semantics of ethnicity; the alleged exogeneity of the ethnic fractionalisation variables; the fallacious idea of causal-

⁶ Of course, the racial partitions aimed at discriminating some group in the population are not shared by those discriminated against as being racially inferior. The perception of self-identity by the victim of racial or ‘ethnic’ hatred is not the same as the stereotype identity label imposed on him or her by the persecutor.

ity in growth processes that the ethnic conjecture illustrates; the political conclusions that result from the ethnic conjecture.

3. THE FLIMSY SEMANTICS OF ETHNICITY.

What do we mean by ‘ethnic groups’ or by ‘ethnicity’? How are ‘ethnic’ partitions defined? The new variable (‘ethnic diversity’, ‘ethno-linguistic fragmentation’, ‘ethno-linguistic fractionalisation’, ‘religious-ethnic heterogeneity’) adopted in growth theory was especially slippery in definition. Meanwhile, anthropologists were critically revising the significance of both the received classification of ethnic groups as reported by earlier ethnographic literature and the meaning (operational and theoretical) of ethnicity concepts in social science [Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart, 2005]. Initially, the ethnic conjecture was based on a revival of the identity between language, culture and ethos of Romantic descent, although conscious appreciation of these roots was lacking. A large part of the literature seemed to share the assumption that ethnicity is to be identified by language, both in the sense that ethnic groups include speakers of the same language and in the sense that language and ethnicity are coextensive concepts admitting of clear-cut partition. The primary sources of the alleged scientific measure of ethno-linguistic diversity were linguistic studies carried out in the sixties and an atlas produced in the USSR in 1964.

In 1972 Taylor and Hudson published a data set on ethno-linguistic fragmentation in the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, where they reproduced, with some adjustment, the indexes from three sources, and in particular the Soviet *Atlas Narodov Mira* [Bruk and Apenchenko (eds.), 1964]⁷. The operational assumption was that linguistic maps are to be used to map ethnic diversity, with no major error, or any further need to analyse other aspects of ethnicity. Taylor and Hudson expressed doubts on the accuracy of the classifications, since it was clear that it is no easy matter to decide where to draw the line between ethnic groups. They observed that the Soviet *Atlas* seemed to suggest close overlapping of language, ethnos and culture⁸. To remove the problem

⁷ The three sources were Rice (ed.), 1962; Muller, 1964; Bruk and Apenchenko (eds.), 1964.

⁸ «Language is frequently an indicant of ethnicity (e.g. Spanish speaking Americans) but this is not always true (e.g. black Americans)» [Taylor and Hudson, 1972: 216]. Taylor and Hudson wrote that the atlas «makes little distinction between ethnic and linguistic

with black Americans, which risked disappearing as a specific group on linguistic criteria, Taylor and Hudson suggested including them as a separate ethnic group, although it was plain that this group was not speaking a separate language. They concluded that the ELF index was close to the index proposed by Greenberg in a previous study on the measurement of linguistic diversity [Greenberg, 1956]. Moreover, the index did not take into account the distances between linguistic groups; all languages and dialects considered in the classification were assumed equally unlike, a problem that remains open in later literature and with reference to more sophisticated indexes.

The early literature on ethnicity and growth simply ignored the debate among anthropologists on rigid ethnic partitions. Some authors noted that the ELF index was possibly ambiguous, but they did not reject the approach and even set out to test statistically the stability of the ethnic coefficient [Arcand, Guillaumont and Guillaumont-Jeanneney, 2000]. Mauro referred to separate ethnic groups as «related mainly to historical linguistic origin» [Mauro, 1995: 692]. He spoke of ‘ethno-linguistic fractionalization’; but in the same paper he quoted the classification in the Canadian census, where Jewish communities of different origin and language were included as a unique, separate group.

In Easterly and Levine’s paper, linguistic diversity and ethnic fragmentation overlapped. None was clearly defined. The concepts of ‘ethnic diversity’ and ‘linguistic diversity’ were used, indeed, as synonyms. Easterly and Levine spoke of ‘ethnic fragmentation’, ‘ethno-linguistic fragmentation’, ‘ethno-linguistic groups’, ‘ethnically homogeneous’ or ‘ethnically diverse’ countries, but the only clear definition of the ETHNIC index was in terms of linguistic diversity. It was thus implicitly affirmed that linguistic diversity and ethnic diversity perfectly matched, being captured by the same index. Easterly and Levine declared their ETHNIC index to be reliable in terms of accuracy and country coverage [Easterly and Levine, 1997a: 1206-1207, 1218 ff.]. They admitted the possibility of measurement error but, to verify it, utilised «four other measures of linguistic diversity» [Easterly and Levine, 1997a: 1207], as if ethnic and linguistic diversity were conceptually the same object. Their very insistence on measurement error shows how they failed to perceive the slippery content of ethnic labels, and the underground racist bias of ethnic classifications used as if

differences in its definition and collection of data. Groups are determined not by their physical characteristics but by their roles, their descent, and their relationship to others» [Taylor and Hudson, 1972: 215].

they were objective data, comparable to physical phenomena, to be measured with appropriate instruments in controlled experiments. It should be observed, in addition, that the measures considered in their paper capture different social and linguistic phenomena⁹.

Collier and Hoeffler introduced ethno-linguistic fractionalisation with no further thought on the meaning of ethnicity [Collier and Hoeffler, 1998]. They simply adopted the ELF index as used by Mauro [Mauro, 1995]. Collier straightforwardly spoke of ‘ethnic diversity’, ‘ethnically fractionalised societies’, ‘ethnically diverse societies’, with no further comment [Collier, 1999a]. Alesina, Baquir and Easterly adopted a racist definition of ethnicity using the measure of ethnic fragmentation based on racial distinction according to the U.S. census classification of ‘races’, an ambiguous classification that mixes up skin colour and the geographical origin of immigrant population [Alesina, Baquir and Easterly, 1999]. Race *i* is defined as «the share of population self-identified as of race *i*», being *i* = White, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian or Other¹⁰. They had the decency to point to the «somewhat arbitrary» nature of such classifications, but boldly asserted that «they also reflect which ethnic groupings are politically salient» [Alesina, Baquir and Easterly, 1999: 1255]. A racist bias is plain in labelling all black American people, or all immigrants of Asian origin, or all Jews as belonging to the same separate ‘ethnic’ group. Considering the patchwork of languages and human groups in Asia, Asian immigrants in the United States can with no simple criteria be labelled as a single ethnic group: certainly not according to a criterion of linguistic diversity, nor on the basis of a criterion of shared traditions and culture.

The uncertain semantics of ‘ethnicity’ was often extended to indicate cultural or social diversity in human groups. Easterly added to the ethnic vocabulary a new variable without any additional explanation of its meaning: «religious-ethnic heterogeneity» [Easterly, 2001: 687]. Is ‘religious-ethnic heteroge-

⁹ They considered as alternative measures of ethno-linguistic diversity the percentage of population not speaking the official language, the probability that two randomly selected individual do not speak the same language, the percentage of population not speaking the most widely used language.

¹⁰ According to the authors, the category Other covers essentially Hispanic people, who do not feel accurately represented in the other racial groups of the census. That is just another example of the inaccuracy in the ethnic partitions that are assumed as objective data. People may simply feel they do not fit into the imposed partitions.

neity' captured by the same index as ethno-linguistic diversity? Are loyalties associated to religious affiliation of the same nature as loyalties associated to 'ethnicity' or loyalties grouping linguistic minorities? Is 'ethnicity' a comprehensive label for every phenomenon of collective identity and affiliation? In later literature these questions finally found some space. The survey by Alesina and La Ferrara is more careful in defining the terms. The authors use 'fractionalization' or 'diversity' or 'diverse society' to label a society which is not homogeneous; they use 'fragmentation' or 'diversity' with the added adjective ethnic, racial, religious to label specific phenomena. They still refer to the American Census that distinguishes five 'races' [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 764]. Ancestry is also considered:

An 'ethno-linguistic group' (often referred for brevity as 'ethnic group') is identified by language only in some cases and in other cases by language and skin color or other physically attributes; a variety of indexes have been suggested and we will discuss below similarities and differences [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 763-764].

The ethnic fractionalisation index used to reach the main conclusion of their study is the fractionalization index detailed by Alesina and other authors in 2003 that is based on the language fractionalisation index as reported by *Encyclopedia Britannica* measuring the shares of different languages spoken as mother tongues in each country [Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat and Wacziarg, 2003]. It is an index of fractionalization basically dependent on language, but it is corrected to take account, when relevant, of 'racial characteristics', skin colour being the most common mark of these. Though it is elaborated on a variety of sources, it has apparently nothing to do either with religion, cultural heritage, ancestry or other collective self-perceived identities. In most of the literature, the indexes used are the traditional ones or variants of those, on the ground that more sophisticated indexes of various source show high correlation with the crude ones originally used by Easterly. Richer descriptions of, e.g. racial segregation by a variety of parameters, though approvingly quoted by Alesina and La Ferrara, are dismissed, since «the data requirements may be insurmountable for large cross-country studies» (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 793).

Should economists use slippery concepts and biased data sets, of whose pitfalls and biases they are well aware, just because they cannot build better data? How robust are the results that they may get with such data? A few at-

tempts at more sophisticated indexes exist, with controversial results. The correlation among the different indexes is not so good and the results are not always convergent (see *Table 2* and *3* in Posner, 2004: 857). In the paper mentioned above Alesina and others computed diversified indexes of 'heterogeneity' of population including an index of religious diversity, another of language diversity and one of ethnicity (the above mentioned index of ethnic diversity corrected to take into account 'racial' differences, mostly in Latin America countries) [Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat and Wacziarg, 2003]. The authors affirmed the long-term persistence of ethnic diversity (in their own estimates), while they recognised a serious problem in assuming religious fragmentation as an exogenous variable, on the obvious observation that it may be affected by lack of political freedom [Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, Wacziarg, 2003: 161].

Fearon raised and faced bravely, more honestly than any other author in this literature, the crucial difficulty of defining ethnic partitions [Fearon, 2003: 197]. He underlined that self-identification of a person with a separate ethnic groups may not coincide with the ethnic partitions perceived by other groups in the same society. He noted that poor economic performance exacerbates distributive struggles changing the saliency of perceived ethnic divisions, while sustained growth may help building feelings of adhesion to a national identity. He suggested, quite obviously, that political conflict and civil war often force people to self-identify with an ethnic identity that was not previously perceived as so salient or conflictive. Fearon insisted on looking after a prototypical definition of 'ethnic group' that he resumed in 7 features: common descent, self-identification, shared culture and values, real or imagined homeland, collective history, self-sufficiency (that is excluding castes or caste-like groups). The database he built was inspired by these criteria, and he added an index of cultural diversity based on the assumption that language is an effective indicator of cultural vicinity. However, he noted that the idea of «an ethnic group is inherently slippery» and the assessment of relevant ethnic cleavages in each country should be based on the opinion of country experts, who might know which are perceived as such by local populations [Fearon, 2003: 197, 215].

Posner observed that there is a «critical mismatch» in most studies between the measure of 'diversity' and the causal mechanism that is conjectured to be the channel through which diversity produces a negative effect on growth performance [Posner, 2004: 850]. He criticized the ELF index used by Easterly and Levine arguing that in the African sample their regressions do not support the specific effect they were looking at (the negative effect of diversity through

worst macroeconomic policies) [Posner, 2004: 859].

Contrary to the assumptions of most scholars who seek to test the effects of ethnic diversity on growth, there is no single 'correct' measure of the ethnic groups in a country, and thus no single 'correct' ethnic fractionalization index value. Countries possess multiple dimensions of cultural cleavage and multiple possible accounting of the salient ethnic communities. Researchers must choose the one that provides the appropriate enumeration of ethnic groups for the specific causal mechanism that is being tested and then calculate their ethnic fractionalization value from that enumeration [Posner, 2004: 850].

Posner went on building a more comprehensive index (named PREG) that he conjectured to better capture the salient ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, saliency being related to macroeconomic policies. Only those groups are included which may be identified in each country to be actors in the competition for resources, considering a plurality of sources. The PREG fractionalization index is still open to crucial criticism, as the author admits: it does not capture potentially relevant variation in group sizes, it fails to account for the degree of concentration or the depth of divisions among groups; and last but not least «it may be endogenous to the outcome it is being used to explain» [Posner, 2004: 855]. This last issue is especially slippery, as Posner is well aware, because to select the basic data on the political saliency criterion comes «uncomfortably close to defining the independent variable in terms of the dependent variable» [Posner, 2004: 855]. The author tried to defend his protocol, the alternative being to be satisfied with 'diversity' indexes that include ethnic partitions totally irrelevant to the political process and macroeconomic policies. The new, allegedly 'objective' and exogenous index is the result of subjective evaluation by the economist based on information on political processes of various sources.

This discouraging methodological mess is the result of the pretension to reduce complex historical phenomena, such as the formation of collective identities and their political relevance, to the computation of exogenous, quasi naturalistic variables, and the associated pretension to force the testing of unidirectional causal links to deal with development processes where interrelation and path dependency¹¹ are core phenomena.

¹¹ In the present paper the term path dependency is used loosely; historical trajectories should not, of course, be assimilated to physical processes.

4. ON THE COMPLEXITY OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY.

The idea that each 'ethnic group' is characterised by an exclusive language as in a one-to-one correspondence is a gross mistake. The difficulty is well known to scholars who attempted classifications of ethnic groups. Levinson, who published an atlas of ethnic groups in 1998, declared that there exist no clear-cut definitions to classify an ethnic group. He considered flexibly language, religion, common history, occupational specialisation, regional localisation, common culture, self-identification, and identification by others.

First and perhaps most important, there are no definitions or criteria consistently applied to delineate ethnic groups in nations worldwide. [...] I have been flexible in the criteria used and have considered language, religion, common history, occupational specialisation, regional localisation, common culture, self-identification, and identification by others as equally valid criteria for labelling a particular group an 'ethnic group' [Levinson, 1998: VIII].

Ethnicity and language are quite obviously false friends. Many linguistic communities extend all over the world, with no cohesion of all speakers in terms of citizenship, social environment, religious faith, food, rules of social behaviour or any other criteria of belonging. Nor does the cohesion of all speakers in terms of language imply their identification in terms of other aspects of their individual and social identity; it does not cancel affiliations to local dialects, regional loyalties, universalistic or sectarian religions, associations, political parties or strong family ties, which make of most linguistic communities something more like a scattered jigsaw puzzle than a homogeneous 'ethnos'. In terms of geographical distribution, languages may be national, transnational, or geographically limited to sub-regions within States. Conflicts involving perceived social identities may tragically oppose speakers belonging to the same linguistic community. Hutu and Tutsi shared the same language. An overwhelming majority of Northern Irish people, who have been divided on religious and political loyalties, speak English as their first language. The boundaries defining linguistic variety are doubtful, since no linguistic community is perfectly homogeneous and borders between linguistic communities are blurred. Well-known examples of variety in language are dialects, *patois*, pidgins and Creole languages [Martinet 1961]. Within the same population languages may be specialised by function (religion, administration, oral or written communication, literary or scientific expression) and jargon varies according to social group or social occasion (family, school, work, age groups, urban or rural population, gender,

etc.). Complex linguistic communities share vehicular languages or lingua franca to communicate. In many communities people may understand each other to a large extent although speaking different dialects, jargons or languages. Bilingual or multilingual competence is acquired from childhood in many societies. Multi-linguistic competence was well known in Europe, where for centuries different languages or dialects coexisted in the same State, with different social functions or spoken by different social groups.

In Europe the diffusion or the creation of national languages was endogenous to wider social and political processes. In many European countries, national languages were established in the process of moulding national identities during the nineteenth century. The adjective 'Rumanian' or 'Finnish' originally indicated neither a nation nor a language, but a peasant [Thiesse, 2001: 67]. As Thiesse reminds in her study on the creation of national identities in Europe, in the late eighteenth century, at the eve of the industrial Revolution, Europe was indeed a complex linguistic environment:

Nombreuses sont les actuelles langues nationales européennes qui n'existaient pas véritablement avant le XIX siècle. Comme les nations, elles ont depuis été gratifiées d'une histoire qui remonte à la nuit des temps, mais leur naissance est toute récente. L'Europe des Lumières présente un paysage linguistique pour le moins complexe. La masse de la population, rurale et analphabète, parle des dialectes qui ne font généralement pas l'objet de transcriptions, tandis qu'existent des langues ayant une expression écrite au statut divers: langues de cour, langues de création littéraire ou philosophiques, langues de l'enseignement religieux, langues liturgiques, langues administratives, langues de l'enseignement religieux, langues de l'enseignement primaire, langues de l'enseignement secondaire et universitaire. Au sein d'une même Etat, il n'y a pas nécessairement coïncidence pour ces différentes fonctions [Thiesse, 2001: 68].

In large part of Europe the ethnographic maps of languages and cultures could not easily trace neat borders or well defined diffusion areas. It is institutional construction that has fostered more homogeneous linguistic communities.

Le critère linguistique lui même se révèle totalement fallacieux, car dans une grande partie de l'Europe les situations de contiguïtés entre populations de parlers différents, les mariages entre 'nationalités' ne permettent même pas de déterminer la langue d'un individu donné qui peut être amené, selon ses interlocuteurs, à en utiliser plusieurs. En fait, c'est par la création d'un État-

nation, l'école, les prescriptions des usages publics et les medias de masse que sont constitués des espaces linguistiques à peu près homogènes [Thiesse, 2001: 232].

On plain historical evidence, linguistic diversity is not static over the long term, since the population of speakers of the same language changes according to demography, economic and social conditions, and political events. As a human institution, language is very mobile. Migrations, urbanisation, the spread of radio and television, the changing levels of education, the formation or dissolution of States, wars or persecution, are all events that may foster or destroy linguistic communities. Ethnic affiliation, when so perceived by people in a human community, or so theorised by ethnic mythologies, may induce the use of the dialect or common language to mark the community politically. The construction of collective identities by language may be the result of policies consciously applied by governments, religious authorities or political movements¹². Once constituted, States apply linguistic policies in education, justice, police and parliamentary activity. In nation States of recent constitution, built on the colonial heritage, the adoption of the codified dominant language results from political decision, which imposes the chosen language in education, in administration and in official communication. Linguistic policies may be soft or take the form of violent intervention to mould identities, aiming at eradicating a language or at spreading it. There are policies to apartheid languages to different functions, such as a mandatory language for parliamentary, administrative or legal acts, or a mandatory language in religious ceremonies. Both in colonial and postcolonial times, religious or political leaders adopted policies aimed at codifying the grammar and the lexicon of local oral languages, for purposes of conversion, persuasion, education, and propaganda. In Africa many oral languages were only shaped into grammar rules and precise classifications during the colonial period. Today, international organisations foster policies to protect local languages from extinction as the number of speakers dwindles.

In all linguistic communities the borders between languages and dialects are controversial. Africa is a rich, complex linguistic environment, and linguis-

¹² In Europe, as Thiesse underlines, the spreading of the national idea had as a consequence the related idea that the nation has to have a unified language: «La nation existe, donc il faut lui donner une langue» [Thiesse, 2001: 70]. In the twentieth century, Hebrew became a spoken, national language in the process of building of the State of Israel, as a result of firm institutional choice.

tic diversity is neither evenly distributed all over the continent nor it exactly maps perceived ethnic identities¹³. There are regions of greater linguistic variety and regions where discontinuities are by grades within the same linguistic family¹⁴ (e.g. Bantu languages). As Reader observes, the different linguistic groups have often much in common beyond what separates them: «The Xhosa and Zulu languages, for instance, are 70 per cent concordant. [...] Furthermore the norms and values which govern the social interaction, marriage and family, and belief systems of the two groups are essentially the same» [Reader, 1999: 615].

The ethnic conjecture ignored the multi-linguistic competence common in many African societies. *Lingua franca* are widely used for communication purposes by African speakers, for whom they are a second language, Kiswahili being a notorious example: «It [Kiswahili] is a transnational lingua franca that is spoken widely throughout East and Central Africa, and is the declared national language of Tanzania and Kenya. The majority of Kiswahili speakers, however, use it as an additional language. Kiswahili has ceased to be in the hands of its native speakers» [Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998: 76]. Today, Kiswahili's status, in competition with English as the language of administration and education, depends on the language policies pursued by governments in Kenya and Tanzania [Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998: 80]. In post colonial Africa, as elsewhere, active linguistic policies promoted transformations in language distribution and hierarchies [Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998]. Historically, religious influences had spread the use of Arabic in many African countries, while colonial dominance had imposed European languages in administration, government and education. After independence, language policies were adopted in African States this being a crucial aspect in the construction of the new political communities. Linguistic policies affect access to fundamental political rights; but the access to language changes also with migrations or socio-economic conditions.

¹³ «Ce qui manque particulièrement aux anthropologues, c'est la définition d'aires linguistiques relativement bien délimitée et situées dans le temps. [...] Nombre d'anthropologues en effet ont insisté sur le peu d'homogénéité linguistique des différents ethnies, dont ils étaient censés rendre compte» [Amselle, 1999: 31].

¹⁴ Fearon explicitly tried to account for this aspect: «The great ethnic and linguistic diversity of Africa is represented by a fairly small number of highly articulated language trees. [...] As a result - and plausibly if arguably - the measure judges some African countries significantly less culturally diverse than they are ethnically diverse» [Fearon 2003: 213].

In conclusion, the mapping of so called ethno-linguistic diversity on rigid, exogenous partitions reproduces the simplified idea of homogeneous human communities speaking a common language and sharing norms, habits, ethos, religion, or perhaps also physical characteristics, as if they were isolated one from another by the barriers of language and custom, and stable in the long term in their cultural isolation. This idea is devoid of any scientific basis.

5. A RADICAL CRITIQUE OF THE 'ETHNIC CONJECTURE'

Indexes of alleged 'ethno-linguistic diversity' were applied to examine 'ethnic diversity' and economic performance, with little care for precise definition of the underlying concepts. Most of the papers discussing ethnicity and growth contained hardly any reference to the ample literature discussing ethnicity in anthropology that has drastically questioned received ideas on ethnicity. The debate is still open [Fabietti, 2001; Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart, 2005].

'Ethnicity', when perceived as an affiliation by human persons, is a cultural identity. It may be construed to fuel conflict, or to serve co-operative purposes. It changes in history. It changes in definition and content for each human being, who self-identifies with some identity; or who is forced by other people to accept the mask of an imposed identity. It depends on variable social relationships to other human beings. It overlaps with other aspects of the perception and construction of collective identities. The ethnic 'heterogeneity' depends on the perception of 'ethnic' diversity, whose dividing lines depend in turn on the historical construction of collective identities. Self-perceived 'ethnicity' may impose strict rules of affiliation and norms of behaviour; or it may leave the individual free to share with other fellows other affiliations and collective experiences. The very meaning of what is 'ethnic' affiliation and how stringent are the obligations it imposes in social life changes in different societies. The weight and content of 'ethnic' affiliations, their degree of exclusiveness, their plasticity or hardening, far from being exogenous invariants, evolve in history even in short spans of time. Ethnic identities belong to the flexible construction of social, political or cultural identities in history [Amselle and M'Bokolo, 1999; Amselle 2001].

The perception of ethnic diversity can clearly be manipulated. Historians studied how the Hellenic myth took form from the vivid imagination of intellectuals in the early nineteenth century. In contemporary history, in Europe as well as in Africa, conflicting ethnic divisions were the direct result of political mythology and propaganda, rather than a datum. Philosophers, scholars of lin-

guistics, historians, and anthropologists disseminated the Aryan myth, identifying the race and language of the superior Aryan population [Poliakov, 1971]. An Aryan 'ethnic' group did not exist in Europe until perception of its existence was fuelled by Nazi propaganda, and the partition of Aryans versus Semites was tragically imposed in occupied countries under the Third Reich.

The intricacies of ethnic labels and their doubtful origin, often an open expression of or mask for racist feelings, have been denounced in innovative studies in African anthropology, which are now well known to all scholars in African studies. An ample literature demonstrates that in contemporary Africa rigid ethnic divisions were to a large extent a colonial invention, often having in view a *divide et impera* strategy to subject African populations to colonial rule by fuelling conflicts or distributing privileges. A notorious historical example is the construction of ethnic division and opposition between Hutu and Tutsi¹⁵. Fixed ethnic identities did not belong to the African tradition, so largely created by colonial taxonomies:

De ce point de vue il n'existe pas plus d' 'ethnie' à l'époque précoloniale qu' à l'époque actuelle, au sens où l'on se trouverait devant des entités homogènes racialement, culturellement et linguistiquement; ce qui a toujours prévalu au contraire ce sont des unités sociales inégales et hétérogènes quant a leur composition. [...] Ainsi est-il parfaitement légitime de se revendiquer comme Peul ou Bambara. Ce qui est contestable, en revanche, c'est de considérer que ce mode d'identification a existé de toute éternité, c'est-à-dire d'en faire une essence. Un ethnonyme peut recevoir une multitude de sens en fonction des époques, des lieux ou des situations sociaux: s'attacher à un de ces sens n'est pas condamnable; ce qui l'est, c'est d'affirmer que ce sens est unique ou, ce qui revient au même, que la série de sens qu'a revêtue la catégorie est achevée [Amselle, 1999: 37-38].

Historian Iliffe emphasised the complexities of ethnic identities in pre-colonial Africa and the cultural and political interactions, which gave birth to

¹⁵ See Reader on *The invention of Africa* for an introductory presentation of the issue [Reader, 1999: chapter 51]. Historian Gentili investigated the construction of ethnicity by the colonial powers for political reasons, and discussed some invented 'historical' reconstruction, which created 'racial' or ethnic groups [Gentili, 1995]. The philosopher Mudimbe addressed the question from the perspective of philosophy of culture [Mudimbe, 1988].

new 'tribal' identities in colonial Africa. Some were fruits of the inventive imagination of intellectuals educated in the Christian missions, other were derived from political efforts to bind local communities and give them a voice, or were formed as solidarity associations of migrant labourers, to give them hope and voice:

Les Africains d'avant la colonisation possédaient plusieurs identités sociales. Il pouvaient appartenir à des lignages, des clans, des villages, des villes, des chefferies, des groupes linguistiques, des États, et à presque toutes les combinaisons possibles de ces éléments, l'identité pertinente dépendant de la situation. Toutes se fondaient l'une dans l'autre car des gens parlant la même langue pouvaient pour exemple appartenir à des chefferies différentes, tandis que l'une de celle-ci pouvait compter des locuteurs de langues diverses. C'était là un ordre social d'une complexité immense [Ilfte, 1997: 328-329].

The question touches on one of the most intriguing aspects of human identities and affiliations: their plurality, their overlapping and their crossing. History has been marked as much by conflict as by dialogue and exchange. Perceived 'ethnic' identities need not be exclusive. In many human experiences, different identities coexist peacefully in the same individual life, with movable borders, as Appiah recalled of his father¹⁶. In the quest for a sense in life people may forge co-operative identities and discover their common humanity [Appiah, 2005]. The possibility of experiencing a plurality of identities is the result of the social and political context. In some historical periods, the partitions are crystallized and give structure to social relationships imposing hierarchy, exclusion, status. A feudal society based on caste imposes fixed identities and restrictive norms of behaviour, much more than it is allowed in contemporary liberal societies. Freedom, social mobility, travelling, trade, innovation, marriage, conversation and disputes have often mixed affiliations and identities in the course of history. Far from being exclusive and fixed, perceived 'ethnic' labels

¹⁶ «The second legacy is my father's multiple attachment to his identities: above all as an Asante, as a Ghanaian, as an African, and as a Christian and a Methodist. I cannot claim to participate fully in any of these identities as he did; given the history we do not share, he would not have expected me to. But I have tried in this book, in many places, to examine the meaning of one or another, and, by the end, all of these identities, and to learn from his capacity to make use of these many identities without, so far as I could tell, any significant conflict» [Appiah, 1992: IX].

are renewed by new values, new cultural contacts, new ideas, habits, or experiences, crossing the cultural barriers of previous generations¹⁷. In developing countries undergoing rapid transformation in terms of economic, social and political conditions, new identities mix or conflict with old ones. The individual goes through a complex, sometimes painful, process of search to mould feelings of belonging, culture, or attachment to perceived ancestry and past history. It is the process of defining new identities. In his book *Beyond Belief*, Naipaul tells the stories of many people crossing the borders of ethnic, linguistic, national and religious affiliations in the Indian subcontinent. He describes the intricacies and conflicts in the formation of identities in the global world, along with the emergence of post-colonial States that define new citizenships and nationalities [Naipaul, 1998].

Social interaction and cultural exchange mould collective affiliations to a greater extent than is usually recognised¹⁸. The definition of religious identities is especially complex in the African continent [Faure, 2000]. Religious affiliation is crucially important in deprived urban contexts, where it offers welfare and assistance including schooling and social ceremonies. Wider religious identities dominate older ethnic loyalties based on linguistic or regional ties, or to varying degrees overlap according to circumstance and interlocutor, as in Western societies. Eclecticism, as so many times before in history, is far from being an exception. The young Rasta in Durban formed their religious and social identity by listening to Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. The Bible, ethnicity and reggae fused in the quest for this 'new global' identity, which helped them to give a sense to their lives [Morgan, 2000]¹⁹.

¹⁷ «le Coca-cola est consommée par les Luo du Kenya à l'occasion des mariages et entre, à ce titre, dans la catégorie des biens rituels» [Amselle, 2001: 22].

¹⁸ On this issue see the interesting analysis of the movement known as *la Sape* (ostentation of elegance and luxurious dresses) among people in Congo and among Congolese traders in Paris [Mac Gaffey and Bazenguissé-Ganga, 2000].

¹⁹ I personally met a number of young rasta in Maputo (Mozambique). One of them had migrated to Swaziland to work in construction. There he became a 'rasta', as he defined himself. His mother and family belonged to a local Christian church; at home they spoke the local version of Shangaan, but the better educated were conversant in Portuguese. The family had immigrated to the capital from the Gaza province, where they maintained a network of family ties. This is just another example of the complex identities, which are born out of urbanisation and migration.

Along with economic and social problems, primordial loyalties, strong social passions or the genuine quest for personal identity mark close adhesion of people to real or 'imagined' communities; but we should carefully analyse how and when new or revived identities become conflictive and along which lines [Geertz, 1999; Vidal, 1991]. Anthropologist Geertz underlined the variety of the dividing lines in acute conflicts among human groups. He pointed out to acute conflicts based on primordial loyalties and conducive to fragmentation or disintegration of political communities as an emerging phenomenon in the eighties and the nineties of the last century, more acute after the collapse of the Soviet Empire [Geertz, 1995]. Geertz strongly refused to class all identity conflicts under the ethnic label, a label charged with a biased biological flavour, as if the conflicts originated from the perception of radical biological diversities by those involved, which is most often not the case [Geertz, 1995]. Geertz recalled that in Ukraine language unites and religion divides, in Algeria religion unites and culture divides, in China 'race' unites and regions divide, in Switzerland history and institutions unite while language divides, and so on and so forth. He argued against the conventional procedure to class under the 'ethnic' label all conflicts opposing strong loyalties (be they religious, regional, linguistic, cultural, racial, national, sectarian or what else) with movable dividing lines. He asked with wry humour whether the Lubavatcher or the Irish gays were to be considered as 'ethnic' groups.

The habit of applying some 'ethnic' label to each and every conflict in history arising among human groups united by feelings of identity and affiliation should be firmly opposed. The great monotheistic religions have universal claims, which is their distinctive mark. Neither Christian nor Muslim is an ethnic label. Christians include people of different geographic origin, nationalities, languages and culture. Muslim worshippers are spread all over the world, from Algeria to Iran, from India and Pakistan to Indonesia, from Great Britain to the United States. Black people in the United States may be Christian or Muslim worshippers or no worshippers at all; the same is true of the other four 'races' censused in the infamous 'race' statistics that depict – we are told- the diverse ethnic groups in the United States. Jewish communities were present in India as much as in Sudan, when not expelled by racist hatred; their food and music include Mediterranean diet and Yemenite songs, as much as northern Gefillte fish or Yiddish violins.

Religious conflict is not to be labelled as ethnic. It has most often been transnational, or it may ignite among people belonging to the same national group, speaking the same language, living in the same region or sharing many

aspects of culture. Such was the case of the religious wars that tore apart European population in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The allied Christian forces that clashed with the Ottoman Turks at Lepanto in 1571 included Christian soldiers of different European regions and different languages. The situation was much the same on the other side. Religious expansion, when aggressive or invasive, may upset whole communities across wide territories. Religious affiliations may dramatically change in relatively short spans of time. The estimated rise in the number of Christian Africans is from 34 million to around 200 million from 1950 to 1990 [Iliffe, 1997: 376]. Islam also saw vigorous expansion. Regional or national conflicts splitting a State or acute conflicts within collapsing States are often not to be ascribed to ethnicity, whatever that label means. In Somalia the devastating civil war was fought among people belonging to the canonical definition of a homogeneous ethnic group. The war itself created new loyalties, oppositions and partitions. Social or political conflict overlaps with ethnic conflict to various degrees, but should not be confused with it.

The meaning of words may be adapted in use, and changed if it helps. It is appropriate to signal the changing meaning. Labelling as 'ethnic' all conflicts does not help us to understand them or to evaluate their consequences, both domestic and international. In conclusion, we should never forget the saliency of identities that fuel conflicts: how the rising of conflictive identities emerges, how the affiliation to one group becomes perceived as exclusive and not overlapping with other affiliations, how it may be tragically imposed on victims, or how it is fuelled by explicit theorising and political movements. The hardening of identities is often the result of aggressive political programme. It is an aspect of totalitarian States both to fuel adherence to totalitarian policies and to nurture collective mythologies on which totalitarian rule rests. Imagined collective enemies are instruments of totalitarian propaganda, and the instrument of violent repression towards excluded minorities.

The historical evidence shows 'ethnic' conflicts or confrontations in African States as elsewhere in the world. Some rigid ethnic classifications of colonial descent have been assimilated by local cultures; some ethnic confrontations exacerbated when confronted with State power. Studies of conflicts in Africa (and in developing countries) show that allegedly 'ethnic' or 'tribal' conflicts have roots in complex historical experience. They are the combined effect of colonial heritage, poorly rooted and contested public institutions and the failure to create authoritative mechanisms to mediate conflicts [Samatar, 1997; Bardhan, 1997]. The hardening of ethnic identities is a cultural and political phenomenon. Amselle suggested that the hardening of ethnic identities and the ex-

plosion of ethnic fundamentalism in today's world resulted from the weakening of the State presence, and it was fuelled by biased ethnic recognition policies practised by international organisations [Amselle, 2001: 23-24]. Iliffe underlined how ethnic loyalties became more binding in Africa as the State contracted. International crises or the sudden collapse of the global international order heavily affected domestic equilibrium in this respect: «Écoles privées, travail au noir, diasporas spécialisées dans le commerce illicite, milices remplaçant des forces de police absentes, associations urbaines assumant le rôle de syndicats inefficaces: tous ces phénomènes mobilisaient des solidarités ethniques» [Iliffe, 1997: 375].

Anthropologist Peters, commenting on Collier's survey at the World Bank Conference in 1999, remarked that «ethno-linguistic diversity» was a too poorly specified concept to be useful in understanding African politics:

The article conflates the terms ethno-linguistic diversity, ethnic diversity, ethnicity, ethnic fractionalisation, ethnic identity and ethnic groups, all of which refer to quite different social phenomena. Ethno-linguistic diversity may not indicate the presence of multiple ethnic groups, and multiple ethnic groups may not constitute social fractionalisation. Moreover the data on ethno-linguistic diversity - most of which were compiled by social scientists, including anthropologists, of earlier generations - overstate fractionalisation in Africa because many of the distinctions are not socially and politically significant. That is, many groups considered distinct because of various ethno-linguistic markers interact almost seamlessly in many parts of the continent. Finally the lack of clarity on what ethnicity is and how it works in political, economic and social ways fails to help understand the political economy of ethnicity [Peters, 1999: 400-401].

Her comment was dismissed in the debate. The short answer to the objection by Paul Collier will introduce us to another unhappy aspect of the story: the use of evidence in the practice of economists and econometricians. As reported in the account of the floor discussion, Collier rejected the objection regarding the ambiguous definition of ethno-linguistic fractionalisation.

That ethno-linguistic fractionalisation is poorly measured is clear. But anthropologists and political scientists created that variable, not economists. And while ethno-linguistic fractionalisation may be a poorly measured variable, Collier doubted that it was so poorly measured as to be meaningless. Collier challenged anthropologists to develop better measures of ethnic diversity [World Bank, 1999: 410].

Evidence, thus, excludes the scholarly narration and arguing by historians and scholars devoted to anthropological and social studies. Evidence is a data set, if available to run regressions on it; measures, if not existing, should be invented. Data sets, once published acquire a life of their own; no further inquiry is welcome to test their significance until better data may be substituted for the previous ones. However, if the ethnic labels and partitions or the fractionalisation indexes (whatever they be) cannot be assumed as exogenous variables in the regressions, all the theoretical construction thus far examined collapses. All the various ethnic conjectures are fragile, if the basic assumption of exogeneity is rejected. A further critique of the 'ethnic conjecture' touches upon the causal links in the regressions run on ethno-linguistic fractionalisation, and the time dimension, forgotten in the analysis. Over which span of time may the economists assume that the given fractionalisation of a society into salient partitions along linguistic, ethnic or religious affiliations, are to be considered exogenous with respect to phenomena such as a changing distribution of income because of taxation policies, changing unemployment rates, a slower growth of income in rural versus urban areas, expanding transport and communication infrastructure, the opening to international trade, education policies, regional flows of international aid, and so on and so forth? Over which short or long term are those fractionalisation phenomena assumed stable and not affected either by government policies or by economic events or by the complex interaction of institution building and economic growth in historical trajectories? It is a pitfall common to the usual methodology applied in growth theory, when comparing rates of growth in different historical experiences [Kenny and Williams, 2001]. Negative externalities and hysteresis along path dependent historical trajectories, may block or slow down the development process [Ingrao, 2001].

Easterly recognised some pitfalls in econometric testing as applied to the understanding of the question he raised. He admitted that «ethnically diverse societies with good institutions» might be those societies that experienced less tension from the beginning [Easterly, 2001: 692]. In short, he admitted the possibility of path dependency with positive or negative externalities along a historical experience. The identification problem thus evident was simply dismissed ²⁰. When dealing with ethnicity abstracting from history and time, con-

²⁰ «This creates difficult identification problems that I cannot resolve in this article, but I do acknowledge the possibility» [Easterly, 2001: 692].

ceptual confusion easily arises between correlation and causation. Easterly concluded that according to further econometric testing, including institutions, «ethnic diversity still causes lower schooling, lower telephone density and lower financial development» [Easterly, 2001: 699]. Ethnicity is interpreted as a time-invariant exogenous variable, which ‘causes’ negative effects. It is bizarre to attribute low telephone density in Africa to ethnic heterogeneity²¹! More reasonably, social fragmentation, ethnic tensions, lack of infrastructure, poor literacy and weak legitimacy of the State are all aspects of the underdevelopment syndrome, which still affects so many African countries.

6. THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ETHNIC CONJECTURE.

The ethnic conjecture was advanced in an international environment marked by globalisation and the debate on multiculturalism in democracy [Taylor, 1992]. Against this background, the loose semantics of ethnic diversity was applied to signal every conflict or potential conflict from cultural or social diversity in human groups. Labelling as ‘ethnic’ all conflicts does not help us to understand them or to evaluate their consequences, both domestic and international. Moreover, abstraction from history provides poor instruments to understand human conflicts. Timing and context are crucial to understand the evolution of events in conflict, war or peace building, under the heavy imprinting left by past experience. Conflicts grow, passions are exacerbated, and wars develop in historical processes, which leave scars and accumulate distrust. The ethnic passions that tragically explode in crises have long been nurtured in processes of social and political change [Vidal, 1991]. Conflicts are managed or avoided by long-term friendly interaction, by slowly rooting of authoritative and recognised institutions, by adapting cultural differences to shared institutions, by cultural exchange, by learning.

In the literature reviewed, diversity in cultures was perceived as having a negative effect on institutional stability. Homogeneous societies are more ordered and better-governed ones, it is assumed. A homogeneous society invests more in education and is spared from paralysing conflicts over public spending or the distribution of collective resources among fractionalised groups. Even when not explicitly mentioned, the ‘ethnic conjecture’ supports the conclusion that ‘ethnically’ homogeneous States have more potential for growth than het-

²¹ A massive diffusion of cellular phones is presently going on in Africa, thanks to the more accessible technology.

erogeneous societies. The emphasis is on the welfare and efficiency costs imposed by the multiplicity of ethnic groups in the same political community. The literature suggests that ethnically homogeneous States are better States, though in the flimsy semantics of fractionalisation thus far reviewed it is not clear what homogeneity means and in which respect it becomes salient to political stability: religion, custom, language, skin colour, ancestry, tradition, food, geography or what mixture of these?

Alesina and La Ferrara advanced the conjecture that under some conditions heterogeneity of population has positive effects on productivity. They develop a model where k different types of individuals - each endowed with specific skills - cooperate in production, with beneficial effects from the variety of their skills. There is a trade off between benefits from variety in skills and costs from ethnic heterogeneity on macro policies. The underlying assumption is problematic: are the classes of individuals, each endowed with specific skills, overlapping with ethnic diversity as measured by some of the mentioned fractionalisation indexes? Is diversity of skills in the population directly related to the diversity of ethnic groups? If this were the case, the assumption underlying the model evokes the stereotypes that mark popular classifications of national or racial groups. Are the Blacks musical, the Jews intelligent, the Italians creative, the Chinese patient workers? Along which lines of 'exogenous' ethnic partitions are the skill groups to be classified and how is it possible to avoid blatant prejudice or racism in such doubtful classifications?

The correction was suggested because, seen from the historical perspective, the ethnic conjecture is on all evidence not sound. Along the centuries, great empires have managed quite successfully and certainly not democratically to govern populations of different languages and custom, by a mixture of cruel repression and various policies of tolerance, integration or devolution. Plain historical evidence, as available by observing the path followed by industrialised countries in their development process, was forgotten in the debate. The United States are a melting pot, as was Europe at the age of the Industrial revolution. California is a rich, multi-linguistic community, and not an example of failed growth. Canada hosts recent immigrants and an Indian population and it is a polarised linguistic community. The European community is a complex linguistic environment, with long-standing conflicts between some linguistic groups, but also showing remarkable co-operation and economic success. Considering the flows of migrations since the fall of the Roman Empire (and before!), the changing political borders, the evolution of languages, the flows of exchange in knowledge, crafts, arts and literature in European history, in the long term it is

probably impossible to trace any stable, exogenous ethnic partition in Europe²². Notwithstanding the pretence of some groups to belong to pure ethnic or national communities, these exist hardly anywhere in Europe²³. European politics is confronted with the task of designing Europe's political institutions on the principle of 'unity in diversity', making them operational and effective [Kostoris Padoa Schioppa, 2001]. Sen argued in favour of the rich, varied cultural environment in India, surviving thanks to the fundamentally democratic organisation of political institutions [Sen, 1999: chapter VI]. These historical experiences have gone through periods of acute crises, risking collapse under the pressure of domestic interest groups, regional or national conflict. On the other hand, none of these historical examples could be defined as failure in growth performance.

The political consequences implicit in the ethnic conjecture are dangerous and, from a liberal perspective, potentially destructive. Should the formation of 'ethnically' homogeneous States be encouraged by international organisations and international diplomacy to improve growth performance in developing countries? Should ethnic cleansing be a precondition for better growth? No one of liberal feelings would like to see such conclusions circulating as the new credo in international policy, nor indeed would the very same authors who advanced the ethnic conjecture²⁴. Of course, policies of 'ethnic cleansing' were never suggested, nor even conceived by the scholars who spoke of ethnic partitions. However, it was implicitly or openly suggested that political institutions should be built on the basis of explicit and recognised ethnic partitions. Collier

²² As an example, the author of the present paper, born in Italy and Italian speaking, is a European citizen of mixed Spanish and Czech origin. Sicily was one of the crossroads of this family pattern. The family includes Sicilian relatives, some of Spanish, some of Norman descent, possibly both mixed at some point with families of Arab origin. Two great grandparents lived in Prague and were surely bilingual (at least) in the German-speaking environment of the Augsburg Empire. Many European citizens share these patterns of family networks. Bilingual environment and diverse cultural background are common for many European citizens, even when they are not so aware of them.

²³ Saint Augustine was an African Roman citizen, Descartes a French soldier dying of pneumonia in Sweden, Columbus a Genoese adventurer finding fortune in Spain, Smith a Scot educated in England and wandering in France, Ricardo a British citizen of recent Dutch origin, von Neumann a Hungarian boy transplanted in Berlin. *Exempli gratia*.

²⁴ Collier observed that «illegitimate acts, such as ethnic cleansing, are hardly to be encouraged» [Collier, 1999a: 388].

and Biswanger argued in favour of the formal recognition of ethnic affiliations in political institutions [Collier and Biswanger, 1999]. Elbadawi and Sambanis called for «ethnically inclusive local systems» [Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 263]. Bigombe, Collier and Sambanis appealed to the involvement of traditional authorities for the beneficial role they may be called to play in conflict resolution²⁵. Collier suggested that high ethnic fractionalisation might help peace building in societies recently emerging from a civil war. It is worth quoting his advice, encouraging ethnic fractionalisation to protect peace: «This result suggests that the creation or maintenance of extreme ethnic fractionalisation may be more effective than economic development at ensuring that peace is maintained following violent conflict. Highly fractionalised societies must be democratic, however, if they are to avoid high economic costs» [Collier, 1999a: 388].

The United Nation Human Development Report devoted to the diversity of cultures (UNDP, 2004) explicitly recommended separate legislation and institutions for ethnic communities in the same country, a proposal also considered in Alesina, La Ferrara in connection with the possibility of splitting heterogeneous countries into homogeneous political units [Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005: 794 ff.]. Some awful experiences have been practised in this direction, the notable case being the Nigerian case that finally raised international protest, when two women were at risk of suffering being lapidated because of local Islamic legislation. A policy of differencing legal systems according to ethnic partitions implies to class citizens by ethnic groups and favours the hardening of ethnic identities. The historians debate whether the 1947 division between Pakistan and India as separate States along a religious divide, at the times realized amidst violent clashes and massive human tragedies, were the source of a persistent confrontation that a shared citizenship might have avoided. Gandhi, it is well known, never agreed with the split of the two nations.

The political consequences of the ethnic conjecture are, thus, dubious and disturbing. *Divide et impera*, democratically, over a plurality of diverse ethnic

²⁵ These authors mentioned Geffray 's most interesting book on civil war in Mozambique. Geffray criticised the violent intervention of Frelimo in rural Mozambique, which caused resentment and provoked self-defence by peasants, and inclined them to collaborate initially with Renamo's army in the area where Geffray conducted his inquiry. It should be remembered that Geffray pointed out to the shocks to established patterns of local authorities caused by the war. In the book he described the emergence of a war economy and the associated change in power in the local societies.

groups to have a chance that no ethnic group grow so strong as to contest the established powers. *Divide et impera* by creating ethnic constituencies and inventing traditional authorities. Otherwise, take care: better to live in homogeneous societies! These consequences are even more dubious when applied to African States. Should African governments encourage a withdrawal from national to local loyalties, instead of asking their citizens to participate in larger constituencies, feeling a sense of belonging to larger human groups? Should African governments encourage ethnic fractionalisation? Along which dividing lines, or by which policies, should they encourage the return of their citizens to local political tribalism? Is this the way out from the tragedies of ethnic confrontation? Should they favour splitting 'heterogeneous' States into smaller but homogeneous political units in a continent that is already split into too many States? Indeed, the excessive number of States is a drawback for development in African politics and political fragmentation, in Africa as elsewhere, is not an asset for growth. Historically, wider political units (empires, nation states or federal states) have provided enhanced opportunities in transport, communication, education, public administration, market spaces.

These issues raise two major questions: the superficial appeal to democracy recurrent in this literature, and the very foundations of a liberal society. To assume 'ethnic' groups as homogenous in identity definition is a risky procedure. American blacks can be defined as a separate 'ethnic' group only by a blatant racist ideology. In Canada the policy of 'ethnic' recognition and the legislation adopted to 'protect' Indian communities created dubious or artificial affiliation to indigenous groups, and cases of forced exclusion [Fabietti, 2001: 123 ff.]. Crazy results are unavoidable if the State sets out to classify citizens according to rigid ethnic partitions – and consider the racist bias so often implicit in ethnic classifications! The official, public classification of a human person as belonging to an 'ethnic' group is contrary to the most fundamental principles of liberalism. It denies the liberty of each person to freely define his or her own identity and affiliations, and to change or enrich them with new meanings, crossing established borders in the course of life. It denies the liberty to freely build feelings of belonging, to personally value perceived identities according to experience, human contacts, and knowledge.

The right to citizenship in many States is based on criteria that include reference to ancestry, and where to draw the political borders between national communities has been the source of much conflict along history. When a history of violent conflict between communities has been experienced for years, when minority populations have been severely oppressed or persecuted, politi-

cal division may be the outcome of last resort, failing any better project of coexistence. However, in the contemporary, global world and in the African countries especially, the fractionalisation of citizenship along ethnic lines is firmly to be rejected as a policy device having in view political stability and liberal democracy in established states. If fixed ethnic lines of divisions were institutionalised, the ultimate foundation of liberalism might collapse. This foundation is the recognition of the value of the individual person as such, and the freedom of individual experience in moulding each human life. The official classification of a human person as belonging to an ethnic group constrains the human person into a rigid affiliation imposed by the State on the basis of defining criteria, which risk being racist in their very foundation. Such procedure is a violation of liberty and constitutional rights. It is formally forbidden in many liberal constitutions that declare the equal rights and duties of all citizens in front of the law, against discrimination. It is conducive to the dangerous renewal of apartheid and will probably be an incentive to further conflict and clashes among the rigid ethnic communities so established. It is extremely dangerous to the domestic and international stability of political institutions.

It has been argued that societies with wider ethnic diversity need more democracy and better institutions to offset the potentially explosive effect of ethnic fragmentation: «Ethnically diverse nations that wish to endure in peace and prosperity must build good institutions» [Easterly, 2001: 703]. According to Elbadawi and Sambanis, «democracy can completely remove the growth drawbacks otherwise associated with ethnic diversity» [Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 254]. Since ethnic antagonism takes place «within the framework of political institutions», well structured institutions may prevent the escalation of ethnic conflict [Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 254]. Notwithstanding the generous appeal to democracy, 'ethnic diversity' is again underlined as a drawback for growth. Once again it is not clear which is the meaning of diversity that is conceived as salient for the cohesion of a society. Does the danger lie in the cohabitation in the same territory of many ethnic groups properly, people that have long lived according to different social norms and cultural traditions? Does it lie in the linguistic variety per se, or does the risk lie in the presence of different faiths practiced by the population of the same State²⁶? Is the problem a

²⁶ Alesina and others estimate that religious diversity is associated to better growth performance, contrary to the evidence for ethnic diversity, conjecturing that religious diversity is probably a mark of democratic States (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kur-

population including persons of different physical appearance as regards skin colour, or is it the persistence of entrenched regional traditions? The plea for democracy offers an attractive, but superficial solution. Citizenship, the adherence to a constituency, participating in a political community, does not wash away the singularity and intensity of other affiliations.

Liberal democracy works if plural collective identities do not clash with one another or with the ethical background, which structures the common principles of legislation and constitutional law. A democratic society experiences conflict on fundamental ethical choices and their application in law and policies. Abortion, euthanasia, drug consumption, the death penalty, divorce, education, social justice and egalitarianism are among the many issues, which divide people in a democracy over fundamental ethical principles. Pluralism and democracy work, if a common ethical background exists on basic principles, if a shared vision of humanity has been forged, if the principles of law and government are authoritative and recognised. Pluralism and liberal democracy are more than the mere coexistence of separate human groups in the same geographical space. They depend on mutual recognition and shared values, the crossing of borders in fixed identities. Should people be encouraged to retreat to localism and rigid ethnic affiliations, State legitimacy, whose weakness in Africa is still so pervasive, will never improve. Liberal institutions crucially depend on loyalty to a larger human community than a very specific group, a loyalty that has to be built and tested experiencing both conflict and dialogue in a shared political space. Cultural identities should be enriched by encounter and conversation. Citizenship, in rights and duties, is to be perceived as a fundamental identity among the many, which structure individual life. Rifts must be addressed in common political discourse and procedures.

In a relatively short span of time, African people experienced a number of extreme shocks to the institutional order of their societies. It is easy to remind the disruption created by the slave trade that created a massive destruction of social capital. At the end of the nineteenth century colonial rule im-

lat and Wacziarg, 2003). No explanation is provided of the fact that according to such evidence, religious fractionalisation does not affect negatively the provision of public goods, while there is no reason to assume a priori that people of different faiths should have more homogeneous preferences on public goods of those expressed by diverse ethnic groups. This comment is just to underline the frailty of both the evidence and the theoretical structure.

posed new borders, new law, new bureaucratic machinery, new military; and the 'invention' of Africa through institutionalised ethnic classification or the recognition of 'traditional' authorities imposed by colonial rulers. A complex interaction was established between colonial administration and African societies [Gentili, 1995: 294 ff.]. The African elites emerging in the fight for independence forged new ideologies of African nationalism [Appiah, 1992]. In post-independence States the construction of political identities and public institutions went through drastic upturns: from democracy to military rule, from centralised State to State collapse, from radical socialist experiences to extreme neo-liberal strategies. The young post colonial States had a short time to build feelings of belonging to their wider political community, and their citizens had most mixed experiences on the opportunities and costs of the national institutions. Absolute poverty, the high rate of population unable to write or read, or having difficult access to the media, severely affect the functioning of democracy. They severely limit the democratic rights on the national arena. In post-colonial times conflicts on the continent have been heavily affected by the intervention of stronger States. The alleged ethnic drawback is better understood when interpreted as the negative effect of frail democracies or totalitarian regimes, contested States, political fragmentation, and the weakness of both national and transnational governance in Africa. Efforts to build wider political institutions are to be welcomed. African people are confronted with the task of building their social identities on wider political horizons, shaping anew their cultural roots and local affiliations.

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